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AUTHOR Bardhan, Nilanjana
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ABSTRACT

This paper points out that in public relations (PR) the global network approach is fast catching on along with the trend of opening subsidiary offices and entering joint ventures and affiliations with PR agencies in various parts of the world. The paper discusses the need to build theory in the area of international public relations so that educators can teach their students about practicing PR in a global sense and offers several models that hold potential for elucidating an epistemology. It considers the current state of international PR education in the United States and outlines nine pedagogical strategies drawn from current research. The paper then suggests 10 pedagogical strategies drawn from personal cross-cultural experience, noting that experiential learning (inside and outside the classroom environment) seems to be the primary catalyst necessary for building realization, openness, appreciation, and eventually eagerness to learn about different cultures and peoples. As part of the overall inquiry for this paper, 22 undergraduate PR research methods students wrote narratives about interest or lack of interest in the global/multicultural aspects of the PR profession, with lack of contact with cultural difference cited as the main reason for lack of interest. The paper then questions whether interest in international public relations can be sparked in the classroom and offers 10 suggestions for what the PR educator can do to make international public relations "real." (Contains 44 references and the narrative assignment.) (NKA)

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Incorporating global/multicultural perspectives in public relations education: An ethnographic account

by
Nilanjana Bardhan
Assistant Professor
Department of Speech Communication
Mailcode 6605
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
Carbondale, Illinois 62901-6605
Phone: (618) 453-2291
Fax: (618) 453-2812
e-mail: bardhan@siu.edu

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Introduction

Nearly 30 years ago, Alvin Toffler (1970) made a general appeal to educators to shift education into future gear.

> It is no longer sufficient for Johnny to understand the past. It is not even enough for him to understand the present, for the here-and-now environment will soon vanish. Johnny must learn to anticipate the directions and rate of change. He must, to put it technically, learn to make repeated, probabilistic, increasingly long-range assumptions about the future. And so must Johnny's teachers (p. 346)

Public relations educators are increasingly teaching their students the importance of issues management and proactive planning. Yet, paradoxically, we are not practicing what we preach. Public relations firms serve a large number of international clients in addition to domestic clients who have publics in different countries. The global network approach is fast catching on along with the trend of opening subsidiary offices and entering joint ventures and affiliations with agencies in various parts of the world. In addition to the already existing international organizations such as the World Health Organization and Amnesty International, the increasing cross-cultural expansion of multinational corporations is a simultaneous growth area where international and cross-cultural public relations skills are in high demand (Stevens, 1998; Bovet; 1994; Farinelli, 1990; Vogl, 1990; Modoux, 1989). Given these current and future trends within the profession, incorporating international and multicultural perspectives into our instruction is itself a form of issues management in public relations education; however, research shows that public relations programs around the United States are sadly lacking when it comes to regularly offering courses or building perspectives that are international, global or multicultural in nature (Culbertson and Chen, 1996; Pratt and Ogbondah, 1996; Vega, 1995).

The world today is a global stage (although a fragmented one) upon which web-like interactions between nationalities, systems and cultures are escalating at a phenomenal pace. Changes in technology, travel, media structures and information flow, geopolitics, patterns of global commerce and investment are reconfiguring our conceptions of the present and future at a rate we barely have a handle on. Advertising and marketing education started adapting to the global *mantra* nearly 20 years ago but public relations has been slow to follow (Ovaitt, 1988). A recent survey of U.S. public relations educators and practitioners that explored the state of current curricula and content in public relations education

found that both practitioners and educators perceive the pressing need to incorporate courses and content that will prepare future practitioners for the global landscape (Neff, Walker, Smith and Creedon, 1999).

Despite this perceived need that is being voiced in various professional and academic gatherings, journals and on-going research the number of such courses and content in public relations programs around the country remain surprisingly low. One reason for this is that although educators recognize the importance of incorporating diverse courses and perspectives, and intend to spend more time in the future developing such content, they feel somewhat unprepared at present to handle the task effectively. Another is the lack of interest, especially among undergraduate students, in exploring the global and multicultural dimensions of the profession (Vega, 1995). What we have here is a pedagogical dilemma where somehow the perceived and actual hurdles in the way of diversifying public relations education are slowing down a process that is already lagging in pace.

Where do we go from here?

An anecdote

After one particularly lively classroom session that involved a charged debate on multiculturalism and international issues, I found myself alone in the classroom with one student who had stayed back. He looked hesitant.

This student, and I need to mention here that he was a minority student (one of three minority students in a class of 25), had played the 'loner' role throughout the semester. He would spacially separate himself from the class by sitting away from the rest of the students and he hardly ever contributed to class discussions. He would be particularly reflective during sessions involving cultural and international dialogue, and I noticed that he would shake his head from time to time – as though in disbelief. But somehow, I couldn't get him to voice his thoughts.

"How can you stand it when they say such ethnocentric things? I mean, surely *you* can understand what I'm saying?" These were the first words that came out of his mouth. To further put this conversation in context, I need to mention that I am an 'international' educator who teaches primarily public relations courses in a predominantly White Midwestern university. "Don't you feel bad in how they think that America is the greatest country in the world? I too am an American, I come from a wealthy background, but I don't think like that. What is it with them?"

It was good to finally hear him talk and understand the reason behind his silence. I explained to him that I didn't feel 'bad' in the sense that I thought he meant. We talked about multiculturalism as a lived experience that comes from within; about how our cultural sensibilities are socially shaped by our cumulative contacts with and appreciation for difference; how being a minority or majority affects perspective; and other issues related to the politics of difference.

This conversation with my student put me in a self-reflexive mode for the rest of the day. Why are some students more open to discussing difference while others aren't? Why aren't they more interested – or are they and I just don't see it? Is that good or bad? It just 'is.' Is there something I do not understand? I do try.

How do I deal with this multiculturalism 'thing' in the classroom? How do I make it into something that will actively interest my students and prepare them for the 'real' world and workplace that is so inevitably diverse? I need to make it relevant – somehow.

Whither theory?

Meaningful instruction, among other factors, needs to draw from a strong theoretical base. The late 1980s and 1990s evidenced an increase in academic and professional discourse on the need to build theory in the area of international public relations because unless educators understand the theoretical ramifications of the practice around us, what and how do we teach our students about practicing public relations in a global sense?

The first step, a critical step, which educators must take in this direction, is to problematize rather than simplify what terms such as 'international,' 'global' and 'multicultural' mean in today's world. There is no doubt that ours is an 'applied' field; however, the application needs to be informed by a critical rather than a reductionist approach to how future practitioners could be successfully prepared to become bridge-builders, cross-cultural negotiators, and boundary spanners in a world that is simultaneously global and local (Burk, 1994).

In the effort to build theory and incorporate diverse perspectives in public relations education we can start, as suggested by Wakefield (1996), by drawing upon interdisciplinary theories that hold potential for elucidating our epistemology. Wakefield offers a useful model for organizing theoretical research in international public relations. This model suggests four theoretical pools that could be tapped for this purpose – global society theories, cultural theories, management theories, and communication theories. The relevant aspects of these theories could be heuristically woven into existing public relations theories to expand our understanding. Contained within these theory pools are the notions of global convergence and divergence (Hennessy, 1985); Hofstede's (1980) classification of cultural values that differentiate individuals and organizations in different cultures; theorizing on globalism and the emergence of 'third-culture individuals' (Casmir, 1993; Shuter, 1993; Starosta, 1991; and Featherstone, 1990); the contingency approach to global management (Katz and Kahn, 1966); culture-free and culture-specific approaches to understanding cross-cultural organizational interactions (Verèiè, Grunig and Grunig, 1996; Brinkerhoff and Ingle, 1989; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; and Tayeb, 1988); and communication theories that explicate media dependency at a global level, explore power configurations embedded in patterns of cross-border information flow, and notions of cultural

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imperialism that attempt to explode the myth of benevolent (or democratic) globalization (Hamelink, 1993; Sinclair, 1990; and Schiller, 1981).

Banks (1995) suggests exploring intercultural communication theory for new knowledge in this area. According to him, any contact between public relations practitioners from different cultural backgrounds (not necessarily international) requires an understanding of how intercultural differences and similarities affect communication. Within the field of intercultural communication, there are different approaches to understanding communication across cultures. There are emic approaches that are more localized or ethnographic in orientation, and there are etic approaches that are more structural and comparative (Gudykunst, 1997). Whatever the approach, Fiske (1993) is quick to point out that cross-cultural interactions are seldom 'equal' since there is always an imbalance of power involved:

> Cross-cultural communication which is initiated and directed by the more powerful of the two cultures (for power difference in always part of cultural difference) always runs the risk of reducing the weaker to the canvas upon which the stronger represents itself and its power (p. 149).

In-depth understanding requires the unpacking of these less tangible aspects of cross-cultural communication as they play out in the practice of international public relations. Other theoretical suggestions include using uncertainty-reduction theory as adapted to intercultural communication (Gudykunst and Hammer, 1988), and incorporating Hall's (1976) 'out of awareness' approach to cross-cultural communication. This latter approach involves exploring cultural variables that affect communication but are not easily recognized in order to create an 'in-awareness' model. Such a model can engender culture-specific awareness of the variables that affect public relations communication in various cross-cultural settings (Zaharna, 1998).

Keeping in tune with such suggestions for theory building, it might be useful to draw upon the critical approaches to international communication put forth by Mowlana (1997) and Hamelink (1993). Both scholars argue that globalization is a fragmented and problematic concept. Deconstructing the realist approach to international communication, Mowlana suggests four alternate approaches to studying this field. The first approach is an idealist-humanist approach that attempts to build global community through empowerment of nations and peoples. The second approach is a political proselytization approach more akin to propaganda, the promotion of myths and ideologies, and the attempt to maintain hegemonic status quo in service of the global market system. The third and fourth approaches analyze the commodification of information in an international context and the positioning of the same as a source of economic and political power.

Hamelink (1993) offers a dual conceptualization of globalism. Monist globalism, according to him, is characterized by autocratic tendencies to homogenize and negate pluralistic interpretations. Pluralist globalism, on the other hand, involves the recognition and encouragement of polycultural spaces in the effort to build a civil society.

Such theorizing is already evident in the works of several international public relations scholars. Kinzar and Bohn (1985), for instance, propose the ethnocentric and polycentric models of public relations as practiced by multinational corporations. The former functions from a monist or centralized perspective where the assumptions about how public relations is practiced in the home country is imposed upon host countries. The polycentric model is more decentralized in the sense that practitioners in host countries are able to exercise a high level of autonomy. Both models have their pitfalls, and Botan (1992) carries this line of theorizing further in the spirit of the two-way symmetrical approach to practicing excellent public relations (Grunig, 1992). He suggests that the intention should not simply be to adapt to another culture's way of practicing public relations but also to learn from that culture in order to enhance ones own culturally-specific understanding of public relations. His public relations matrix offers guideposts for such understanding, and for avoiding ethnocentric assumptions about the functions of the profession in other cultures.

Analyzing the drawbacks of the ethnocentric approach to public relations commonly followed by multinational corporations, Wilson (1990) explores some critical elements linked to issues management at a global level. She stresses that

> Issues management in an international environment requires that the research function of the process be continual and self-critical, localized to draw on indigenous expertise and insight, comprehensive to include social and cultural beliefs and practices as well as historical cases and trends, interpretive, chronicled and catalogued for accessibility, and cybernetic to encourage public participation (p. 40).

There is vast potential for on-going theoretical explorations in international public relations. Practice needs to inform normative theory and vice versa. It is a stimulating challenge that requires theorists and educators to walk the tightrope between extreme universalism and extreme cultural relativism, avoid creating false dichotomies between the global and the local, distinguish between the mechanical and organic levels of globalization, and engage in an on-going and self-reflexive knowledge-building process that penetrates classroom interactions.

The current state of international public relations education in the United States

Several studies shed practical light on the state of international/multicultural public relations education and practice and the 'troubled spots' that need to be addressed. According to practitioner Jean Farinelli (1990) who has many years of international experience, an unfortunate provincialism still prevails in the public relations industry in the United States. Pointing out that today it is London and not New York that leads the path to excellence in the profession, she makes a strong appeal to U.S. practitioners to develop a keen international focus.

Fitzpatrick and Whillock (1993) conducted an extensive survey of practitioners to gauge preparedness for global assignments. Responses from a national sample drawn from among the members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) indicated a general lack of preparedness and that most practitioners did not directly feel the impact of globalization in their daily practice. However, results also showed a strong perception for the need to be more prepared for future globally-oriented assignments. A similar and more recent study that investigated the same phenomenon among PRSA members (Freitag, 1999) showed that there is a significant link between international preparedness and interest on the one hand, and relevant coursework completed in college, foreign travel and language proficiency on the other. Cross-cultural communication, non-U.S. economics, international business, and foreign language courses emerged as salient for future success. Foreign travel (during college, personal vacations, work-related and other opportunities) correlated strongly with the perception of success in international public relations practice.

Another recent study extensively surveyed public relations educators and practitioners on various issues related to curriculum (Neff, et al., 1999). The sample was drawn from among the members of eight leading communication and public relations professional associations. Among the results that dealt with desired and found educational outcomes, it was discovered that a global perspective and proficiency in a language other than English were among the lowest found outcomes although it is a high desired outcome. Among the overall recommendations were suggestions for increased attention to the study of ethics, technology, multiculturalism and international issues.

Another national survey of public relations educators which was triangulated with feedback from in-depth phone interviews with select educators with several years of experience in teaching international public relations courses showed that although the educators perceive the importance of incorporating international and multicultural content and coursework in curricula, they feel that most educators do not feel adequately skilled to do so (Vega, 1995). An overwhelming majority of the educators surveyed did not speak a language other than English but were interested in preparing themselves to offer such coursework. According to these respondents, the most important aspects of

international training include an understanding and appreciation for the social and cultural norms of different countries; foreign language proficiency; and knowledge of international media systems, political structures, laws and regulations, and local conceptualizations of public relations. A definitive finding was that undergraduate students tend not to be as interested in international education as graduate students mainly due to factors such as lack of financial support to fund international travel and study, the pressure to graduate in four years, and the perceived lack of job opportunities in the area.

Other studies show that very few international public relations courses are currently offered at universities across the U.S. (Culbertson and Chen, 1996; Pratt and Ogbondah, 1996; and Sommerness and Beaman, 1994). In addition, most public relations textbooks currently used for undergraduate education include marginal treatments of minority or international issues (cited in Vega, 1995). The current lack of diversity in public relations education that feeds the pipeline of the future workforce is an obvious 'troubled spot' compounded with the lack of interest among undergraduate majors who eventually apply for the entry-level jobs and the lack of expertise among educators to offer courses devoted to international public relations.

Pedagogical strategies drawn from current research

The problem seems to be in the process. Starting with the finding that there is a general lack of interest among undergraduate students leads us to probe how public relations educators can make multiculturalism and global issues more relevant to these students' interests. For this to happen, we need to critically consider our pedagogical approach to creating interest. Various suggestions have been offered through previous studies that suggest both top-down and grassroots approaches. Vega's (1995) study found support for the following strategies:

1. Encouraging students to travel through study abroad and exchange programs, field trips, internships and leisure opportunities.
2. Inviting guest speakers with international experience to speak with students.
3. Incorporating international and multicultural examples and case studies throughout the PR curriculum.
4. Recommending relevant cognates and electives in and collaborating with departments such as linguistics, anthropology, business and marketing, and international studies.
5. Encouraging students to interact with international students and inviting them as guest speakers for classes
6. Using international media and the Internet for class projects.
7. Stressing multiculturalism within the U.S. and extending the concept to the rest of the world.
8. Requiring language proficiency in a language other than English.

9. Encouraging PRSSA chapters to organize international seminars, workshops, conferences, and case study competitions; sponsor foreign travel and internships with overseas agencies; explore opportunities for student and faculty exchange programs; involve international students in PRSSA activities and explore on-campus opportunities to engage in multicultural campaigns; set up on-line discussion groups that would involve public relations students from different countries; and establish sister chapter ties with public relations student bodies in other countries.

Pratt and Ogbondah (1996) strongly advocate developing courses specifically devoted to international public relations. Referring to the scope of these courses, they emphasize the inclusion of differing environmental influences on the practice of public relations in different countries such as the culturally-specific historic shaping of public relations in the U.S. and in other countries; comparative approaches to the legal, political and ethical dimensions of the profession within and outside the U.S.; an understanding of the international media system; the public relations aspects of international diplomacy, power relations, cultural, political and social developments; and the public relations opportunities provided by international organizations.

Burk (1994) suggests several approaches to training public relations practitioners to be effective in cross-cultural environments. These training approaches could be effectively imbibed into public relations class activities. Drawing upon general systems theory, Burk positions practitioners as boundary spanners who "span the boundary of the organization and purposefully interact with those outside the organization" (p. 42). In order to prepare boundary spanners to be culturally sensitive, his first training suggestion is to reduce ethnocentric tendencies. His follow-up suggestion is attribution training or creating the critical realization through explorations of past cross-cultural blunders or the difficulties that American public relations practitioners have experienced while communicating across cultures. His final suggestion is the use of experiential learning through cultural immersion, field trips and role playing.

In order to cultivate cross-cultural communication skills and sensitivities among public relations students without adding extra courses or consuming too much class-time, Gay Wakefield (1999) suggests the use of a professional diagnostic and development program that is based on an intercultural communication inventory used for corporate diversity training programs.

Pedagogical strategies drawn from personal cross-cultural experience

Speaking through lived experience, experiential learning (inside and outside the classroom environment) seems to be the primary catalyst necessary for building realization, openness, appreciation and eventually eagerness to learn about different cultures and peoples. The sooner we, as educators, can do our part

in sparking this interest in our future public relations practitioners, the more prepared they will be for the global environment.

As a 'third culture" individual who has lived, studied, conducted research and worked in two countries, and has been continuously involved in cross-cultural interactions within each setting, I would assert that my early exposure to the concept of difference engendered a grassroots enculturation that laid the foundation for my interest in this area. Particularly during my years as a student, my exposure to people and practices from different cultures and countries, travel, and classes that were intercultural and international in focus further honed my propensity to permeate this perspective into my work and pedagogy. Courses that exposed me to the art of critical thinking further taught me to naturally live and apply my multicultural sensibilities in the classroom, and in professional and social settings.

Now, as a public relations educator who embodies 'international,' 'intercultural,' and 'minority' every time I walk into a classroom, I find that I am able to use this positionality as a useful pedagogical tool in most situations. Simply by interacting with me, students are in the inevitable position of consciously or subconsciously acknowledging these concepts that I strive to incorporate in my pedagogy. I use this as a starting point in my role to further encourage those who are already interested in exploring cross-cultural applications, tapping the latent interest in those who are more passive, and creating cognitive dissonance in those who are more culturally centered in their thinking about public relations theory and practice.

Drawing upon these experiences, the following are my suggestions for overcoming some current pedagogical hurdles in international public relations education such as lack of student interest and educator preparedness. Some of these suggestions conceptually overlap with those suggested by previous research.

1. Encourage global and multicultural thinking among students by demystifying the concept of difference. Students could be encouraged to become involved in organizations that bring them into contact with students from other countries and cultures. Personal contact and immersion is a likely interest builder and a way of seeing similarities along with the differences. Students should be asked to share such experiences with the class in terms of how they would apply their knowledge in public relations settings requiring communication across cultures.
2. Follow a grassroots approach to building cultural sensitivities whenever possible in all public relations courses. Some pedagogical strategies could involve edutainment (Rogers, Aikat, Chang, Poppe and Sopory, 1989) projects such as watching movies from other countries with follow-up exercises or discussion that involve the exploration of public relations principles embedded in the movie; bringing in guests

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speakers who represent different cultures and American students who have traveled and are eager to share their experiences; share pertinent cross-cultural anecdotes whenever possible; assign projects and case studies that involve research on international and cross-cultural public relations. Incorporate the Internet and international media in such projects.

3. Critically analyze the concept of ethnocentricism and how it may jeopardize relationship management with clients, media and publics in other countries. Often ethnocentricism is invisible to the self. We, as educators, need to be skilled and sensitive in bringing about this understanding, promoting self-disclosure, and creating self-reflexivity among our students. One way of doing this may be by attempting to explode the myth that the U.S. is the trend-setter or leader in global public relations.
4. Create a sense of relevance and adventure among students for the international scope of public relations. Share current information about growing job opportunities in this area, explain trends such as the proliferation of global networks and multinational corporations, and creatively bring to life the connectedness between the U.S. and the rest of the world.
5. Include at least one required public relations course devoted to international and intercultural public relations in the curriculum.
6. Team-teach special offering courses with faculty from other departments who can contribute to this area (e.g., international marketing, anthropology)
7. Encourage PRSSA students or the student-run firm to engage in cross-cultural activities and seek accounts that require multicultural public relations skills.
8. Include a foreign language requirement in the curriculum.
9. Educators should be involved and active in international public relations research and activities. Membership in international professional organizations such as the International Public Relations Association and the International Business Communicators Association are obvious options. Membership in professional public relations associations of other countries as well as exchange program opportunities could also be sought according to interest.
10. Educators could maintain a database of foreign travel or overseas internship opportunities through professional and on-campus contacts. They should also help students to apply for financial aid, scholarships and grants that will cover expenses and motivate them to pursue such opportunities.

Students speak

As part of the overall inquiry that resulted in this paper, I involved the students in my undergraduate public relations research methods class as co-participants in this research effort. Their participation provided valuable qualitative data and addressed the issue of lack of interest among their peers in the global/multicultural aspects of the profession they are preparing themselves for. Through application of the notion of respondent anonymity previously discussed in this class (they were not required to write their names on their papers), the students were encouraged to practice self-disclosure while offering insights in the following areas (see Appendix for actual extra credit assignment):

- Some possible factors that may cause the general lack of interest in the global/multicultural aspects of public relations
- How activities and experiences outside the classroom could make a difference in the shaping of such interests
- Suggestions for public relations educators on how they can help students cultivate interest in this area within the classroom and through class/extracurricular activities

The 24 students in this class, mostly juniors and seniors, were all public relations majors or minors. Twenty-two papers were turned in, and students drew heavily upon personal experiences while providing feedback. Analysis of narrative was employed as an inductive methodology for data interpretation. Through paradigmatic reasoning (Polkinghorne, 1995), reading, and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) interpretation of the narratives provided by the students, prominent themes emerged to produce the 'best fit.'

The process of interpreting the narratives was a refreshing learning experience from an educator's perspective. While bracketing my presuppositions all along, I was enthused by the depth and insight revealed through this exercise – an intellectual endeavor likely aided by the component of anonymity woven into the assignment. Much of the feedback echoed previous findings in this area.

Why the lack of interest?

Most of the students asserted that the focus of this question is skewed, and that it is not as though they cannot become interested in the multicultural/global aspects of public relations theory and practice. The pulse of this matter, according to them, lies in understanding the relevance, immediacy and importance of such knowledge to their future careers. Students "think it will only pertain to them if they are planning to work in another country or with other countries. This is a huge misperception because what they do not realize is that even if you are not working directly with someone from another country, the messages you produce are seen by members of all ethnicities. If you do not know about issues from other nations and cultures, you are likely to fail at what you are

trying to accomplish." Such connections need to be made clearer. Students also felt that inadequate advising at an overall level is one reason behind this lack of understanding and perception of relevance.

Majority of the students expressed that the overall undergraduate curriculum leaves students with little time to take 'extra' courses that are relevant to developing international/intercultural skills. "I know from my perspective, having enjoyed my intercultural communication class as much as I did, I would want to expand my knowledge on the aspects of multicultural and international settings. However, the requirement does not state the need for it. There seem to be other courses that are of more importance to my graduating, so I look no further." The pressure to graduate in four years was oft quoted as a major reason behind this phenomenon. According to many, the hurry to complete all requirements detracts from time that can be directed toward courses and activities that develop cross-cultural skills and appreciation. "Even though there are many resources for college students to become less multiculturally challenged, many students do not have the time to research all the opportunities available. It's hard enough to graduate in four years, much less tour the world." Some students expressed that learning one or more foreign languages would be a definite plus in the field of international public relations; however, they also admitted that most students don't care or are 'too lazy' to take language courses unless required.

Others feel that current public relations curricula do not incorporate enough materials in this area. "Personally, the idea of employment in a multicultural or international setting is very interesting, but how would I be encouraged to pursue this? I've only heard of these opportunities mentioned in the classroom in Introduction to PR, and even then it was just referring to how much the business world is changing." Another student expressed that the lack of interest could be ". . . because multicultural and/or international PR is not seen as a glamorous area of study. Most often when a student thinks of PR, they think of doing public relations for a recording group, or a high-profile personality."

At a more meta level, the opinion was that the overall undergraduate curriculum is ethnocentric in content and structure. "A final factor that could lead to this lack of interest is that we, as students, are not being offered nearly enough courses that revolve around any culture other than our own. Prior to college we are given a very limited look at the world, and I feel that this egocentric way of education leads to disinterest later in life." Such a focus, according to the narrative, also detracts from other efforts by educators to generate interest in cross-cultural and international issues.

The lack of contact with cultural difference was cited as the main reason for lack of interest. Narrating the experience of growing up in a diverse neighborhood, and pointing out the relevance of this experience to student interest in international public relations, one student wrote that this early experience ". . . interested me and made me want to learn more. I now have an everlasting goal to

keep receiving as much information about other cultures as I can. I think this builds character and helps communication in a professional setting."

Can interest in international public relations be sparked in the classroom?

Yes and no. A student's short story on international public relations:

> *A man from China comes to the United States in order to start his own public relations business. He takes on a few clients, but does not retain any of them. They do not agree with his philosophies and they are not pleased with his results. He acts nervous or too quiet around them and doesn't shake anyone's hand.*
>
> *The above example is a stereotype, but stresses the three ways I think that culture, politics, and comfort zone within other countries hinder public relations graduates from fully succeeding in foreign countries or multicultural settings.*

The consensus was that interest in international public relations is inextricably intertwined with students' attitude toward what global and multicultural mean, and how these meanings are conditioned mostly through forces that shape thinking outside the classroom. "After all, a man who would constantly blame 'old people, women, and foreigners' for the mishaps on the road raised me." The influence of parents and how much or how little they encourage diversity issues was the top item on the list of shaping influences, as was the community in which one grows up. "My parents are very open-minded and exposed me to many views of the world. But I was still not exposed to many cultures at a personal level. Children who grow up in homogenous communities are probably scared because they don't understand difference."

Other factors included high school education and its lack of international focus; the possibility of negative encounters with difference on the interest in pursuing knowledge about different cultures and languages ("Prejudice is a two-way street. I feel that I have been the victim of prejudice multiple times. I don't know how many times I have been rudely referred to as a 'little white girl.'"); lack of overseas travel exposure; social pressures to graduate, get married and find a job close to the family; the juxtaposition of mostly negative images of other countries in the media with positive images of American values and ideals; other media stereotypes of culture ("For example, a co-worker assumed that I knew how to play basketball well. Is this a stereotype? If this person gets to know me he might learn that I can't play basketball therefore, dispelling any notion that 'all' black people are exceptional athletes."); discomfort with difference and the tendency to stick to cultural 'comfort zones;' language barriers ("My lack of communication skills in other languages is a big reason why I, and surely many students wouldn't be encouraged to pursue a career overseas."); lack of sufficient

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contact with international students; the viewing of international students' hardships in the U.S. as setting the tone that American students would have similar negative experiences in other countries; and the overall lack of exposure to cultural difference ("I remember many times visiting the international sections of museums or studying other countries in social studies, but the reality that these other cultures exist never hit home. My theory – because when we were in these museums or in class we were still surrounded by 'our' kind.").

An interesting theme that emerged was related to the psychological power of the American Dream and suburbia culture, and how that detracts from interest in international assignments. "It is hard to imagine living the American Dream with a spouse, two children, a dog, and a house in the suburbs if you are traveling or spending time in another country."

Ethnocentricism or the tendency to view the U.S. as the center of world business and economics was the underlying theme of the entire narrative. Navigating two contradictory notions simultaneously, many of the students expressed that ethnocentricism is present among many students ("Currently I think it is very difficult for Americans to realize how important it is to understand other cultures. I think we are trying very hard to block out the fact that American companies are moving their operations elsewhere"); however most would become interested in the international and multicultural relevance of public relations if they could have the right contact with multiculturalism, either by accident or through thoughtfully devised curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The overall consensus was that interest can be sparked in the classroom but it is not possible to 'force' it. "Forcing information about a certain culture is not a way I find interesting. Giving someone hands-on experience is the best way to promote interest." The critical juncture lies somewhere between classroom efforts, students' interest, and their sociocultural experiences. "Of course you can teach students about difference and how to apply that difference in PR, but if they never come in contact with what you are talking about, well then it's all a fairy tail [sic] to them. It doesn't exist."

What can the public relations educator do to make international public relations 'real?'

"There are soooooo (did I make my point?) many ways that a PR educator can help students build global and multicultural communication skills." The following is a list of pedagogical suggestions arranged in order of importance accorded to each:

1. The need for overseas public relations exposure in the form of study abroad opportunities, internships, and exchange programs. More sources of funding were cited as necessary for interest in such opportunities. "I have never had the chance to study overseas, however, if had the chance I would jump at it." Another related suggestion was the incorporation of

field trips to agencies or organizations involved with international assignments.

2. The need to increase student participation in on-campus multicultural events, involvement in international and multicultural student organization activities, exploring opportunities to team up with international students as 'speaking partners,' organization of cross-cultural dormitory activities, and collaborating with international students in designing campaigns specific to other countries and cultures. The added suggestion in this area was to bring these experiences into the classroom through discussion ("I can't stress enough the power of discussion in the classroom") and other forms of public relations-related applications. "To be able to relate to a multicultural environment, you yourself have to be multicultural."
3. Invitation to guest speakers with international public relations experience and hiring educators with expertise in this area ("For example you, Dr. Bardhan, share things you have experienced in India. Those experiences are interesting and contribute to students' understanding of your culture. It can also make them realize the similarities between themselves and their teachers"). Students do not want to just study about international public relations but need to feel like "they are really experiencing and understanding it."
4. The need for more career-related information on international public relations in the classroom and also at campus career fairs.
5. Include at least one entire course on international public relations in the required sequence.
6. Include international case studies, projects and materials throughout the public relations curriculum. Suggestions for projects included watching movies and documentaries about other countries and cultures, cross-cultural teamwork, discussing international news events, role playing that would involve researching other countries and cultures, ethnic days, and extra credit assignments 'like this one.'
7. Connect with public relations students in other countries using resources such as the Internet.
8. Involving PRSSA in such efforts or forming a separate organization for students interested in international public relations.
9. The need for educators who are knowledgeable in this area and who support the 'free flow of ideas.' "I have learned that if teachers take a different approach to an issue, the students are more likely to respond in a positive way. I was not aware that this was an issue (lack of undergraduate interest in international PR) until I sat down to do this assignment. Now that I am, I will try to learn more about these topics so that I will be more marketable when I graduate and I am looking for a job in public relations."

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The need to decenter cultural thinking, increase international and intercultural contact inside and outside the classroom, and explore creative ways to provide hands-on experience in this area were the underlying themes for this section of the narrative. "To create an interest in international and multicultural issues in PR, you have to first create an understanding." Woven into the various classroom activity suggestions were the notions of using emotional appeals, creating a sense of adventure, and adopting an edutainment approach to international public relations. "In order for PR educators to build global and multicultural communication skills/knowledge and bring about a reality check, the teacher has to make it fun."

And last but not least, students expressed that it is not just the educator's responsibility to spark interest in the relevance of international public relations. According to the narrative, the educator's role is that of an enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide who provides the information through affective teaching thereby opening up the world of international/multicultural opportunities in public relations to students.

Conclusion

According to veteran public relations educator James Grunig (personal communication, October 25, 1999) who has been teaching full graduate-level courses in global public relations for the past six years, there is often not enough room for such courses in undergraduate public relations curricula. According to Grunig, given such constraints, the best way to address the situation is by incorporating a whole section on international public relations in the introductory theory class and by internationalizing all the courses as much as possible. Following the generic-specific approach to public relations theory, Grunig states that this approach may also be applied to classroom instruction and activities. "Public relations theory is basically the same in different cultures but the theory must be applied in ways that are appropriate to the culture, political system, and the like. Therefore, at the end of the first theory course, we talk about how to globalize the concepts they have learned."

According to Jed Nitzberg, APR, (personal communication, September 30, 1999) vice president of public relations for the Arthritis Foundation, who has also had teaching experience in the field, practical approaches such as overseas study, internships with foreign companies in the U.S., and inviting international professionals to give guest lectures are useful approaches to making the international aspects of public relations 'real.'

Some overall themes and suggestions for future directions for pedagogy emerge from these various forms of feedback, personal experience and past research. First, it is important to combine both top-down/theoretical and grassroots/experiential approaches to incorporating multicultural/global perspectives into public relations education. Just as theory and practice are interdependent, so must be the approach to international public relations

education. Just talking about the importance of international public relations in the classroom is not sufficient to spark students' interest. They have to be able to *live* international public relations in order to understand its relevance.

Second, the focus should be on producing polycultural individuals who are able to decenter their cultural thinking in various international or multicultural public relations settings and design strategy/communication accordingly. Just knowing how public relations is conceptualized in another country is not enough and can lead to stereotyping which causes more harm than harmony.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, we educators need to be equally open to constantly honing our knowledge, skills and research in this area so we may be competent and enthusiastic teachers with the capacity to generate interest among our students. Learning is a two-way street, especially when it comes to matters that involve expanding the mind beyond that with which we are most comfortable identifying. An extra effort is needed to fine-tune current undergraduate curricula in order to incorporate much needed courses and opportunities for students to engage in activities that will provide them with 'real world' multicultural/international public relations experience.

To conclude in the words of one of the students: "I live, sleep, and dream as an American. I want to know what it's like to wake up to a whole new way of life. I want to wake up, watch television in a country where they speak another language. I want to wake up knowing my American laws do not protect me anymore… I truly want to learn more about the international world of PR, but I don't know how to go about it. Any ideas, Nilanjana?"

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Appendix

SPCM 382/Research Methods in Public Communication
Bardhan

Extra Credit Opportunity
(25 points)

We live and work in a very interconnected and diverse world. Recent surveys of PR practitioners show that they are interested in hiring PR graduates who have the knowledge, skills and appreciation for working in such an environment; however, they complain that graduates of current PR programs are not prepared enough to handle PR work in multicultural and international settings.

Lack of interest seems to be the main problem. Previous research on this topic shows that there is little interest in international and multicultural issues at the undergraduate level.

Therefore, the first thing PR educators need to figure out is how to create this interest, and this cannot be possible unless they *understand* some of the reasons that cause the lack of interest.

You are all undergraduate students and can offer your views on this matter.

1. Explain, based on your own experience and understanding, some possible factors behind this lack of interest.
2. Creating interest in global and multicultural issues is not limited to the classroom. It's an interest that often develops naturally through various experiences and cannot be forced. Discuss how activities and experiences outside the classroom (could be on-campus) could make a difference (either ways). Draw from personal experiences if you can.
3. Suggest as many ways as you can think of in which a PR educator can help students build global and multicultural communication skills/knowledge. In other words, what teaching strategies and activities do you think would interest you?

Put some critical thought into this assignment. Avoid trying to shape your responses according to what you think might be politically correct. I'm interested in what you **REALLY** think.

To help you write without inhibition, I'm offering anonymity. You don't have to put your name on the paper. I will just write your name down when you hand in the paper so you can get credit for it. There will be no way in which I can trace a paper back to the writer.

The paper should be double-spaced; use 12-point font and staple the pages.